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ABSTRACT

This practitioner's guide to helping employment program clients find, retain, and advance in jobs is based on the experiences of Moving Up, an employment program operated by New York's Vocational Foundation, Inc. (VFI). The guide begins with an overview of Moving Up, which has become a national model for helping disadvantaged minority youths develop the job and interpersonal skills needed to find, retain, and succeed in employment. The next two sections examine two aspects of the program: (1) enrollment, training, and job readiness (expectations and support, key staff roles, recruitment, program eligibility, screening, training and instruction, case management, stipends, medical and social services); and (2) placement and follow-up (job development, career counseling, and strategies for dealing with crises and building lasting relationships with clients). Presented next are nine principles for successful job retention: hold staff accountable for ends, not means; introduce clients to a "culture of employment"; stress coordination and continuity throughout the program; hire counseling and training staff based on personal skills and professional credentials; maintain a network of services that support the whole person; let students develop a close relationship with at least one caring adult; after students are employed, incorporate the program's services into the rhythm of their workday; cultivate employers; and begin retention at intake. Appended is information on VFI's history, mission, and activities. (MN)

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ED 429 190

GETTING IN

Staying on

Moving Up

A Practitioner's Approach to Employment Retention

Tony Proscio and Mark Elliott

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Ted Houghton conducted many of the staff interviews and made valuable contributions to our assessment of the key program elements. Elisabeth King devoted many hours to analyzing VFI's performance and ensuring the report's accuracy. Elisabeth also worked with Joe Tierney organizing and conducting focus groups with participants. Joe Stillman and Carol Clymer read drafts of the report and offered a number of helpful suggestions.

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GETTING IN *Staying on* **Moving Up**

A Practitioner's Approach to Employment Retention

Tony Proscio and Mark Elliott

"I took a day off because I was tired," a young woman recalled, soon after getting a job through Moving Up, an employment program operated by New York's Vocational Foundation, Inc. (VFI). "I called my job, but I didn't tell my career advisor."

Thus began a typical story in the ambitious job-retention effort that has made Moving Up a national model. VFI's career advisors are the front-line employment specialists who not only help graduates find work, but who then stick with those graduates for up to two years, making sure they stay on the job, learn and advance.

The young woman who told this story, like many graduates of successful employment and training programs, had learned new skills, earned a GED and landed a job. Working with VFI career advisor Leticia Simmons, she had started off well. And, like more than three-quarters of Moving Up placements, she was still on the job three months after being hired. Now, though, the unexplained absences were starting and her job was in jeopardy.

Ms. Simmons, concerned about this pattern, had phoned the workplace early that morning and learned that her client had once again called in "sick." Here is how the young client told the rest of the story:

> *[Ms. Simmons] called me and said, "I'm at the subway station; get dressed because you're going to work." She came from Jersey and I live in Brooklyn. She didn't tell me she was coming, but later she rang my doorbell. When I pressed the intercom and said, "Who's there?" and she said, "Ms. Simmons," I thought I was gonna cry. She sure enough surprised me that day.*

Not every Moving Up placement needs this much personal intervention. But the career advisors, who form the backbone of Moving Up's post-employment strategy, pride themselves on a "whatever-it-takes" approach to keeping young people at work and focused on advancement.

Young adults enrolled in Moving Up describe career advisors as surrogate mothers, fathers and big sisters or brothers. As one enrollee put it, "You talk to them about certain things you can't talk to your parents about. And they give you advice. I mean that they're wise being that they're older and that they've been around the world, so to speak. They know what's going on and can help you out." Career advisors, said another recent graduate, "will take you out to lunch to see how you act when you're outside the office. 'Cause sometimes when you go outside the office you feel more relaxed... But [they also know that] if you slack off at this meeting, you're going to slack off at the job."

VFI's students make up a carefully targeted middle ground of deeply disadvantaged young people who are nonetheless able and motivated to get help and work toward success. To enroll in VFI, students must complete an extensive application and enrollment process that tests their determination and will. But those who do so are still highly unlikely to make it in the labor market without help. Participants' academic skills are, on average, far below standard for their age level, and the vast majority have dropped out of school. Their work history is negligible, their occupational skills are small to nonexistent, and their interpersonal skills are more

likely to undermine than promote any progress in the workplace. In many cases, even their physical health is substandard.

Consequently, Moving Up is designed to equip them with far more than just skills and encouragement. For two years after completing the program, students can expect regular and frequent follow-up contacts with VFI's career advisors and other program staff. From the time they enroll, participants are the responsibility of several VFI professionals, whose performance evaluations depend on the outcomes their clients achieve in the labor force. The program creates an almost immediate atmosphere of workplace discipline buttressed by close, supportive relationships between the students and adult counselors—people who are chosen precisely for their ability to set high standards and then do whatever it takes to achieve them. That combination of high expectations and firm support lasts from training and placement through the long and critically important period of follow-up.

The results are impressive: two full years after taking their first job, more than 74 percent of graduates are still active in the program in one way or another (including attending college or GED classes, participating in training and seeking new jobs), and 63 percent are still working. About 12 percent had been promoted and 31 percent had been given raises. At the end of two years, the average wage of those employed was $8.64 an hour, a nearly 8 percent increase over the first year. Considering that enrollees are nearly all among the groups that the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) defines as the most disadvantaged and difficult to place, this record is significant. Given the lack of federal funding for job-retention programs, and few other reliable sources of funds for this purpose, the universe of such programs is small and poorly documented. Data on longer-term retention rates elsewhere are almost nonexistent. So it is not possible to say whether Moving Up is the most successful effort anywhere. But anecdotal experience strongly suggests that the program's results for job retention and promotion are significant and that they call for wider replication and careful study. VFI maintains exceptionally careful data on its graduates and their performance—a management resource that makes Moving Up useful as a guidepost for others who may wish to develop a job-retention program.

The critical factor in Moving Up's success with job retention appears to be that it is not a separate "follow-up" program—although that is how it was originally conceived—but a fully integrated element of VFI's whole employment strategy. The entire program, from recruitment onward, is designed to focus young people on a career, not just on a job; it is structured to equip them with habits, skills and, most distinctively, adult relationships that will be long-term assets for them in the workplace. The program makes available to every graduate a team of adult counselors and trainers, all of whom have long-term career development as part of their mission. And most important, by the fourth month in training, every Moving Up client has begun working with the career advisor who will follow and support that client for the next two years.

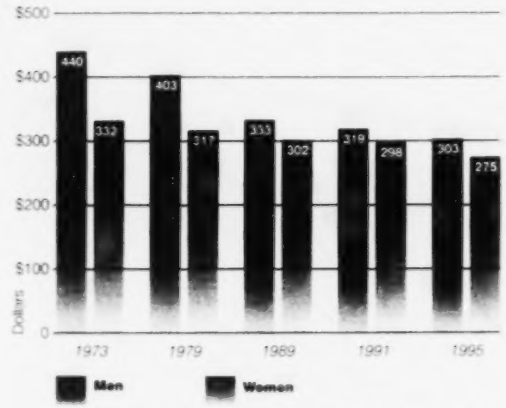
The Employment Prospects of Young Adults

Over the past 25 years, young people have had an increasingly difficult time succeeding in the labor market. Prior to 1973, the earnings of young adults (and older workers) had been increasing. Since then, they have eroded significantly, as illustrated in Figure 1. Between 1973 and 1995, the earnings of young men who were employed full time declined from $440 per week to $303, a 31 percent drop. The earnings of young women working full time have also fallen from $332 to $275 per week, a 17 percent drop.

While the labor market prospects of young adults have generally dimmed, high school dropouts are facing particularly daunting challenges. For example, only 36 percent of young workers under the age of 25 who do not have high school degrees work full time (compared to 55 percent of all young workers), and only one in nine are earning more than $300 per week (compared to 28 percent of all young workers) (Sum et al., 1997).[1]

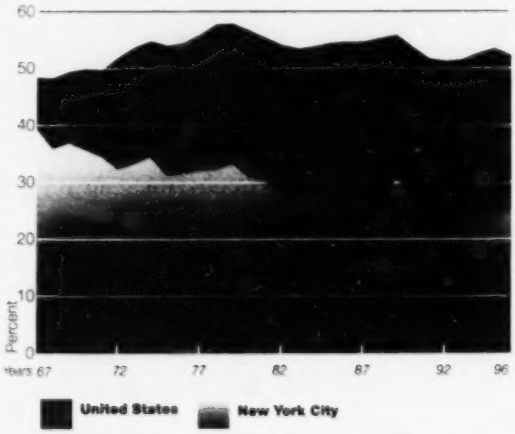
Young workers in New York City are much less likely to be connected to the labor market than are their peers in the rest of the country. Over the past 30 years, labor force participation rates for New York youth have fallen from 40.2 percent to 25 percent and are now well below half the participation rates of young workers nationwide, as documented in Figure 2.

Figure 1
Median Real Weekly Earnings of Young Adults
Young Adults (under 25) by Gender from 1973-95 (in constant '95 $)



Source: May 1973 Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, as presented in Sum et al., 1997.

Figure 2
Labor Force Participation Rates of Young Workers
United States vs. New York City; Both Sexes, Age 16-19



Source: Regional Bureau of Labor Statistics, New York City.

FIRST STEPS: *Enrollment, training and job readiness*

In 1997-1998, VFI used $1.5 million from New York City's Department of Employment through federal dollars from the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and from the City's Department of Youth and Community Development for its basic employment and training program for disadvantaged youth. An additional $713,000 in private foundation grants financed its innovative employment-retention strategy. The retention element, called Moving Up, had been piloted a few years earlier for certain students who seemed to need and want follow-up support after taking a job. It proved so successful that VFI eventually extended it to all trainees as the organization's standard model of training and employment service. Today, Moving Up describes the whole VFI program model, from intake through post-employment services.

Moving Up is designed to ensure that clients achieve "sustained employment and financial stability rather than merely placement in the first job." Unlike most efforts to connect low-income youth to employment opportunities, Moving Up provides extensive case management and counseling before, and up to two years after, a client's initial placement into a job. These privately funded support services are closely linked with program components commonly funded by JTPA: skills training geared to particular industries, remedial math and reading classes, a GED preparation course, and job placement assistance.

The focus of this report is the extended period of after-placement support and career development that makes the Moving Up program unusual. Still, critical as these after-placement services are, they make up just one of many interwoven parts of the VFI system, all of which contribute to job retention, continued education and increased confidence among the program's participants. So, to understand how Moving Up accomplishes these longer-range objectives, it is important to begin with the program's earlier phases.

At the Core: High Expectations and Lots of Support

At its most basic level, the Moving Up model depends on high expectations for client behavior and achievement in an intensively supportive and structured environment. The program enrolls economically disadvantaged young people between the ages of 17 and 20 (direct placement services are available for young fathers up to age 24) who no longer go to school. Once enrolled, students attend a five-month course of remedial math and reading classes, computer instruction, GED preparation and job-readiness training. At least a month before the course is completed, VFI career advisors and job developers begin helping graduates with placements into full-time jobs paying at least $6 an hour. Once employed, the client continues to receive assistance and support from the program, including case management, mediation and counseling, job upgrade assistance, and any other necessary services for up to two years after the initial job placement.

Throughout the program, VFI attempts to create a culture of achievement that not only mimics the workplace environment but also affirms the clients' importance in that environment and the opportunities it presents them. Moving Up participants have to commute daily to VFI's main office in mid-Manhattan, punch a time clock, wear business attire, and follow typical workplace protocol in their dealings with each other and with staff. In return, they receive bimonthly food and transportation stipends, which they are encouraged to think of as paychecks, as well as unflagging encouragement and positive reinforcement from staff members.

Some clients naturally chafe at the strict enforcement of program rules that are often more demanding than those of the schools they left or even of the workplaces in which they will soon be placed. For example, male students must wear ties whenever they are on VFI premises, and no student may chew gum; the eventual jobs often have no such requirements. But almost all involved agree that such a rigorous atmosphere is a beneficial counterweight to the generally unstructured home environments of most clients. Said one:

> *You get hypnotized when you come up here. You get away from the streets. You don't see people from your neighborhood as much and then you tend not to miss it … I like to get up for work in the morning. I like myself when I go to work … [I lost my job] and now the only thing I hate is being home … Every day I go down to VFI just to be in Manhattan and to dress up and to go in there with my little tie … and you know, eventually if you keep trying, you're gonna get it.*

Like many other aspects of Moving Up, the enforcement of strict rules during the training component of the program is intended to smooth clients' transition to full-time paid work. While attending training, clients can develop good work habits before they begin paid employment, when the consequence of failing to follow rules can be the loss of the job. Instead of getting fired, a

Moving Up's Performance

VFI serves a group that few programs have been able to serve well—poorly educated minority youth. Nearly 90 percent of people who enroll at VFI have neither a high school diploma nor a GED, and most are between the ages of 17 and 20. Of the 87 percent of enrollees who complete skills training, 78 percent are placed in jobs. The placement rate is well above the New York City average of 39.6 percent for youth employment programs.*

VFI seeks to maintain contact with everyone (including program dropouts) for two years after they leave the program. By any measure, VFI appears remarkably successful at keeping in touch: career advisors are in contact with 85 percent of participants one year after they leave the program, and 74 percent after two years.

Eighty percent of those placed are still employed after three months, 62 percent after one year and 63 percent after two years. Employment retention rates are lowered by groups who are particularly difficult to serve: one year after job placement, 44 percent of teen mothers on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), 50 percent of participants who were in foster care, 48 percent of those with health problems, and 51 percent of controlled substance abusers were still employed.

There are signs that VFI's participants are moving up: 31 percent received salary increases within the same job and 12 percent were promoted within the same company. Wages rise steadily, from an average of $7.32 an hour, to $7.98 after 12 months, to $8.64 after two years. Wages for those who are placed in a job paying at least $7 an hour are most likely to move up—they are making an average of $8.83 one year later and $9.16 after two years. In contrast, those placed in jobs paying less than $7 an hour make $6.67 an hour after one year and $7.43 after two.

VFI focuses on more than employment in its efforts to enable participants to support themselves. Thirty-two percent of participants earned a GED after enrolling. Of those who stayed in touch with VFI counselors for at least a year, nearly 36 percent earned a GED. In addition, 94 percent of the young women attending VFI did not have additional children during their participation.

* John Evansohn of the New York City Department of Employment indicated that the 39.6 percent average placement rate applies to both long- and short-term training programs for youth. According to Evansohn, among the city's long-term employment and training programs for young people, which include VFI's enrollees, the average placement rate is 64 percent.

consistently tardy client will have repeated opportunities to change behavior with VFI's support. When the time comes for a real job, the transition to a rigid work schedule is not nearly as abrupt, and success is more likely.

Key staff roles

VFI's emphasis on smooth transitions has led it to create an unusual staff structure that provides both a clear delineation of roles and shared responsibility for client outcomes. Over the course of the program, students in Moving Up deal with four categories of professional staff: case managers, who are their first mentors in the program; instructors, who teach classes; job developers, who broker most of their employment opportunities; and career advisors, who guide their transition into work and continue to advise and encourage them afterward. The responsibilities of these staff members deliberately overlap, a feature that has proved to be a significant strength of the program.

During training, students' focus is mainly inward, on their skills and readiness for employment. Case managers offer continuing motivation and employment-readiness training during this period, and they address housing, health and other personal issues. Meanwhile, instructors focus mainly on skills development. But beginning in the fourth month of training, the main responsibility for students' success starts to pass gradually from a case manager to a career advisor, who helps turn their focus outward, toward employment. About this same time, a job developer also takes responsibility for each trainee, completing the three-person team that will guide the student into a job and beyond. Because the move from training to paid employment is the most difficult transition in any employment program, the Moving Up design deliberately increases the level of support during this critical period—when all four levels of professional staff are working with students in concert.

Without careful management, these intertwined responsibilities could provide an unwelcome opportunity for the client to fall through the cracks or get tangled in staff turf battles. But at VFI, the transition is governed by a carefully orchestrated hand-off of responsibilities that extends for up to two months over this critical training-to-work period. Instead of staff conflicts, the overlapping roles in Moving Up are precisely calibrated to encourage team effort and smooth transitions.

To understand the various roles and how they interact, it may be simplest to divide the program into its main stages. This section deals with the stages leading up to placement and the following one covers the remainder of the program.

Recruitment, Program Eligibility and the Screening Process

In 1997, Moving Up enrolled 293 students from an initial pool of roughly 900 applicants. To attract eligible students, a full-time recruiter makes presentations about Moving Up to foster care programs, public housing community centers, group homes and other places where out-of-school youth are likely to congregate. Counselors in high schools and the juvenile justice system also generate a large number of prospective participants.

All those enrolled are economically disadvantaged youth no longer attending school, and its participants fall into many of the categories normally associated with a low probability of success in the workplace: 90 percent have dropped out of high school; 32 percent are on public assistance; 97 percent are minorities; and an alarming 60 to 70 percent test positive for some form of sexually transmitted disease at their initial medical examination. VFI does not test for use of illegal drugs (except when an employer requires job applicants to be tested), but staff believe that most of those enrolled have used drugs at some point.

Participants must demonstrate a basic capacity for employment. They must be able to read at least at a sixth-grade level and have at least fifth-grade math ability, and they must demonstrate enough motivation to participate fully in the program. Moving Up's extended application process not only measures academic ability but also vigorously tests clients' motivation.

Applicants often must appear for multiple interviews and must participate in pre-enrollment activities or submit additional written information. In the interviews, according to one case manager, the conversation ranges among many topics that may be unrelated to the program: "I just get to know them, how they talk, how they think, their body language." One result of this extended screening process is that up to two-thirds of prospective clients typically self-select out of the program before they are ever officially enrolled. Some applicants decide the program is not for them and discuss that conclusion with case managers. In those cases, VFI furnishes referrals to other more appropriate programs (unless the case manager disagrees and talks the applicant into remaining). Many applicants, though, simply fail to show up despite regular call backs. In the end, however, whatever their educational deficits and difficult backgrounds, those who stick it out have proved by their perseverance that they have the desire to work and succeed that is essential for the program to be effective.

VFI allows its case managers wide latitude in evaluating prospective clients. Some prefer to meet with applicants one-on-one; others prefer a group setting or some combination. "I can tell what a person is really about in a group setting," says one case manager. "One-on-one they know they're being observed and they stay on their best behavior. In a group, they relax a little and show their true colors." All prospective clients must come back for at least a one-on-one meeting with the basic paperwork

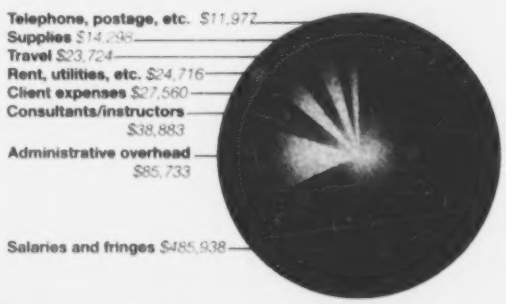
The Cost of Moving Up

Since VFI's employment retention efforts are as extensive as any in the employment field today, it comes as no surprise that they command significant resources. In fiscal year 1997-98, VFI spent approximately $713,000 on employment retention assistance for the 803 people in the caseload. These expenses, summarized in Figure 3, include direct staff costs for nine career advisors and the unit supervisor, as well as related rent, utilities and overhead expenses.

Including overhead, Moving Up spent just under $900 per participant last year—or $1,800 per person for the two years they remain in the program. Approximately $720 per participant was spent on direct services, while $180 was spent on overhead, rent and other indirect expenses. It should be noted that New York salaries are significantly higher than those in many areas of the country; VFI pays its career advisors between $32,000 and $38,000 annually.

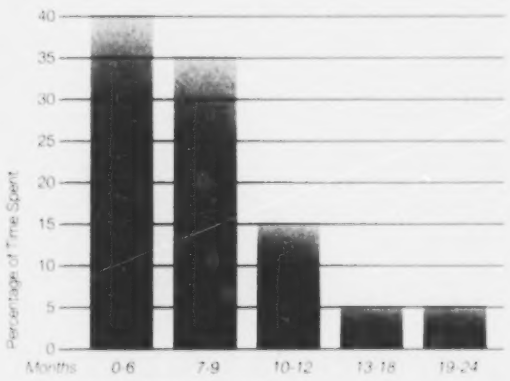
Much of the retention effort occurs soon after placement. VFI estimates that 40 percent of the time staff spend on post-employment services is during the first six months after a participant graduates and 90 percent during the first year, as Figure 4 illustrates.

Figure 3
The Annual Cost of Moving Up's Employment Retention Program



Source: P/PV analysis of VFI data

Figure 4
Allocation of Staff Time With Clients
24 Months of Post-Employment Services



Source: P/PV analysis of VFI data

required by JTPA regulations: identification, welfare information, school information, identification of children, and so on. That is when most applicants stop showing up. Even so, case managers usually call those who drop out and reschedule meetings several times before giving up.

Training and Instruction

Moving Up starts new classes 11 times a year. Participants attend training five days a week, seven hours a day. Between classes, the VFI hallways resemble a small urban high school. Clients spend their mornings in three one-hour classes of basic skills training (GED preparation, writing skills and math); then after lunch, they attend three hours of vocational training followed by one hour of "soft" skills ("people" skills) training led by their case managers. Classes typically contain 20 to 25 students, though when extra funding is available classes grow to as many as 27. The training cycle lasts 22 weeks, or 675 hours of instruction.

The majority of participants choose to attend one of two courses of instruction: Computer and Office Technology or Hospitality. Comp/Office Tech classes combine clerical skills, like typing and data entry, with the use of basic software in common office use. The Hospitality course places clients on a career track in the hotel and hospitality industry, ending in a one-month internship at a major New York hotel.

The hospitality course also teaches the use of computers, among other skills training, relying on industry-designed software that teaches students to deal with day-to-day hotel management issues. At the end of the program's one-month hotel internship, about one-third of the hospitality students get permanent jobs at their internship sites. The others are generally placed into positions at other hotels and businesses in the tourism industry, like travel agencies and restaurants.

About 20 participants each year enroll in VFI's Drafting and Construction Inspection Training, which combines on-the-job training and classroom courses in advanced math and basic drafting. In addition, drafting trainees study advanced drafting in either civil, structural or highway design, and construction inspection trainees take courses in materials testing and surveying techniques.

For students in all curricula, case managers lead a one-hour interactive class at the end of each day, concentrating on improving interpersonal skills and developing professional behavior. VFI graduates and staff seem to agree that mastery of these soft skills has the most bearing on students' eventual success in the workplace. Says one VFI manager, "Sometimes it's the most basic things, like smiling at strangers. Most people know instinctively that that's a prerequisite for good customer service. But growing up in the projects, you'd be considered a punk for the very same behavior. Our students have to learn to change some of their learned behavior to succeed."

Case Management

The three case managers are responsible for student performance from initial enrollment until the third month after the student has been placed in a job. The average case manager's caseload is 22 people per class, whom they see individually an average of every two days during the training period. Because the class cycles overlap, a case manager's total caseload at some times can be as high as 40. VFI evaluates case managers on the performance of their caseload during this period, including improvement over the course of the training, job placement rates and job retention at 30 days after placement. Case managers are also held responsible for clients who have not been placed for up to 90 days after training is completed.

Although case managers shoulder the primary responsibility for meeting the New York City Department of Employment's 55 percent placement requirement, VFI actually holds them to a higher standard. To satisfy VFI's internal requirement, at least 70 percent of a case manager's caseload must be placed into jobs within 90 days after training. Although other VFI employees, including job developers, instructors and career advisors, share responsibility for achieving these results (and are evaluated partly on the same performance numbers), the case manager has the lead responsibility for students' success in training through initial placement and for 30 days thereafter.

Case managers guide clients in setting their own goals and then remain alert to behav-

Key Operating Principles

- Management by outcomes.
- A "culture of employment" in the training center.
- A close mentoring relationship before and after placement.
- Tending students' physical and emotional, as well as vocational needs.
- Picking staff with experience, "passion and compassion."
- Smooth transitions from training to placement to retention.

Tools for Success

- A selection process that tests motivation.
- A management database that tracks results before and after placement.
- A "paycheck" and other interim rewards for students during training.
- An ombudsman to look after students' well-being during training.
- Business lunches and other post-employment incentives for staying in touch.
- Nonintrusive contact with employers.

iors or attitudes that might undermine those goals. They must establish a bond with clients that is strong enough to allow for effective counseling. But they are also responsible for enforcing the rules of the program—dress code violations, for example, may warrant a conference; repeated absences or lateness require additional make-up classes. Throughout the five months of the training program, the case manager acts as mentor, confidante and coach, attempting to tie together every aspect of the program—skills building, the job search and the hour a day of interpersonal relations training.

A "Paycheck" from Day One

Beginning two weeks after orientation, clients get subway or bus fare to and from VFI. At the beginning of classes, they also qualify for a $4-a-day participation stipend intended to pay for lunch. This support, issued bimonthly, gives students a taste of the rewards and demands of earning a periodic "paycheck." As an incentive to keep participating, the $4 lunch stipend is withheld until the fifth week of the program, at which time each client gets a $100 lump-sum check. After that, regular bimonthly payments continue until the last month of training, at which time they are again withheld until the client has completed five or six weeks on the job. On graduation from training, and again at the end of the two-year follow-up period, clients receive such presents as calculators, dictionaries, and even alarm clocks.

The practice of withholding stipends began when it became apparent that many students were dropping out of the program after they received their GED but before they had been placed in a job. Although the payments are small, they can be significant to students who, in the main, still live with parents but have little family support.

Medical and Social Services

Throughout the five months of training, two years of follow-up, and the few weeks in between looking for a job, VFI provides an extensive network of resources to support the client. The comprehensiveness of this support may be the greatest strength of the program and certainly is an important key to its success.

A distinctive feature of this support is the program's full-time nurse who doubles as a kind of general "ombudsperson," referral service and a one-person resource development department. As part of the orientation curriculum for incoming clients, nurse Elzada Azikiwe refers each client for a complete medical examination and conducts a general health assessment, including a questionnaire and interview. She also maintains close ties to New York City's free adolescent health clinics, where she can refer clients under 20 for relatively quick medical appointments.

Because pregnancy is one of the most likely reasons for a client to drop out of the program, the nurse and other staff consistently promote birth control with pointed questions about how frequently the client has sexual intercourse and what methods of birth control he or she uses. "It's not enough to just ask them if they use it," Ms. Azikiwe said. "You have to ask what kind they use and how often they use it. Did they use it last time? And the time before that?" Condoms, prescriptions for birth control pills, and other forms of contraception are available directly and confidentially.

Her resource bank also includes free referrals for eye care and prescriptions for glasses, dental care, OB/GYN and other essential health care. She has found solutions and resources for some more extraordinary health care needs as well, from securing new false teeth and providing directly observed therapy for tuberculosis to arranging for corrective facial plastic surgery. Her periodic health education classes range far beyond the typical curriculum to encompass money management, hygiene and mental health.

In fact, in VFI's lexicon, "health" services extend far beyond the world of medicine to emotional well-being and self-esteem. Nurse Azikiwe routinely tends to entirely non-medical needs, such as free business clothes, haircuts and housing. As a result, the nurse's office also features racks of dark suits and ties, white blouses, and dress shoes.

PLACEMENT AND FOLLOW-UP:

Where job retention begins

When they reach their fourth month of training, Moving Up clients meet with one of three job developers—the "sales engine" of the VFI employment system. Unlike case managers and career advisors, job developers work directly with clients only in the process of matching them up with jobs. In the job developer's world, employers are the "client" at least as much as students.

The initial meeting between the student and the job developer is conducted as a formal job interview to give clients their first rehearsal for the real thing, and to give the job developer the best possible impression of the client's "marketability." The case manager and job developer meet afterward with a career advisor, who soon will be the student's main guide into the world of work. They discuss how the client might improve his or her performance, allowing the case manager and career advisor to provide more one-on-one coaching during the job search process. After the interview, the job developer has six to eight weeks to place the client into a job paying at least $6 an hour.

The Job Developer's World

According to one VFI manager, "the job developers have the hardest job in the agency." They spend most of their time on the phone, cold-calling employers and renewing old connections in search of entry-level positions. Because field experience and employer connections are so important to the job, VFI will not hire a job developer without several years experience (one has been at it for 37 years).

When dealing with a potential employer, the job developers stress the candidate's qualifications rather than the good work of the program. Although some tax credits are available for hiring VFI clients, job developers do not emphasize these or other "social benefits" of hiring Moving Up graduates. "The employers can't afford to be interested in helping the program out," one job developer said. "They need to get a good employee."

The job developer usually contacts the human resources/personnel department of a potential employer to ask about specific jobs advertised and any other positions that

might be open. After years of working in the field, the VFI job developers often receive inquiries directly from employers. The job developer typically sends three resumes for every one position available, under a general cover letter that explains the Moving Up program (each job developer has a fax machine). If the employer is new to VFI, the job developer will usually send the most highly qualified candidate, the "door opener," in the hope of enticing the employer into a longer relationship with the program. Large employers with regularly available entry-level positions are the job developers' lifeblood, and they will do anything to keep such companies loyal. If a new employee from VFI fails at a job, endangering the business relationship, "I'll send roses if I have to," said one job developer. Anything to maintain the pipeline.

Sometimes job developers will make a presentation to VFI clients about what to expect in the job application process, but more commonly their face-to-face contact with students is limited to the mock job interview. They then discuss the interview with the student afterward on the telephone and may schedule additional interviews for other job possibilities. Occasionally, a job developer might counsel the client and offer advice and support, but that is mostly the role of case managers and career advisors.

In total, about 87 percent of all enrollees complete classroom training, amounting to some 250 graduates per year. VFI graduates approximately 11 classes a year, depending on funding streams, and makes an effort to spread the start of classes evenly throughout the year to avoid having large clusters of participants searching for jobs at the same time. There are, however, busier periods, and job developers prepare for these crunch times by lining up interview slots and job openings before they have even met many of their clients. Says one job developer, "You've got to be ready; you don't want anyone to fall through the cracks." While graduating classes take up much of the job developers time for three months of each year, the rest of the time goes to clients who have already been placed in jobs but have lost them or who are seeking advancement opportunities—"upgrades," in VFI's parlance.

Program graduates are placed in a wide range of jobs, depending in part on their course training and work experience. The majority of participants find work in business services. Fifty-one percent of VFI trainees work for business in such jobs as administrative assistant, bookkeeper and file clerk. Twenty percent are placed in the hospitality industry; 15 percent find jobs in the retail sector and about 10 percent in building maintenance.

Career Advisors in the Lead

At about the same time students are meeting with job developers, they are also getting to know a career advisor who will become their main support through the placement process and two years of follow-up. Whereas the case manager supported

Characteristics of Good Job-Retention Staff

- People with back-grounds similar to those of students.
- People who have worked in the private sector.
- People with experience counseling or supervising similar young people in entry-level jobs.
- People who are:
  - articulate,
  - optimistic,
  - persuasive,
  - motivational.
- ...but most of all, people who *perform.* That means:
  - measuring performance, sharing the information with staff,
  - promoting and rewarding staff accordingly.

the client's efforts to learn job skills, pass the GED exam and prepare for the job search, the career advisor's efforts focus more on the job search itself, and then on keeping that job and working toward advancement.

The career advisor must now begin to establish the same kind of close, supportive mentoring relationship with the client that the case manager already has. To do this, many career advisors begin the process well before the fourth month. Says one, "If I could, I would like to meet the clients and begin working with them from the first day of classes." While many of the career advisors do meet with clients as early as the third month of training, their caseloads of at least 50 clients (with as many as 50 more on inactive or graduating status) preclude too early a relationship.

The work of career advisors deliberately overlaps with that of case managers and even, to a lesser extent, of job developers. On paper, it may seem wasteful for career advisors to be helping clients with resumes, scheduling job interviews or brushing up on their testing skills after the case managers and job developers have already done similar work. But in fact, this triple coverage works: because it comes at a critical time of transition, it has proved effective at underscoring the importance of these tasks while giving students plenty of adult support and guidance when they seem to need it most.

Early in the placement process, career advisors also help clients conduct a job search

on their own, without reliance on job developers. While most Moving Up clients need help finding jobs, the program is nonetheless designed to teach them how to look for work on their own. So the "self-search" proceeds at the same time that the job developer is looking for placement opportunities. Career advisors show students how to scan help-wanted ads, write cover letters and resumes, make telephone inquiries, and generally look for work independently. And in fact, this often yields results: almost 20 percent of Moving Up placements every year are the results of clients' own efforts.

Beyond 9 to 5

Career advisors take turns hosting after-hours labs twice a week, where clients can spend a few hours working on their typing skills, polishing resumes or getting help with anything else that may arise. The after-hours lab is often just a place to "hang out" that is away from a bad home environment or neighborhood. Career advisors also run more structured workshops on such topics as conduct in the workplace, job search techniques, career choices and dealing with job loss. Career advisors teach clients how to deal with office gossip and politics and how to interact with their supervisors.

Sometimes these groups are more formal, sometimes less. Clients and their career advisor may, for instance, simply watch a movie together and then discuss its relevance to their own situations. Career advisors also make use of cultural outings and the discretionary funds that go with them to build a peer support network and to cement their relationships with the clients. Almost all staff members escort clients to plays, movies and music or dance events, usually with donated tickets and money from a discretionary fund to pay for modest meals (employees are allowed to spend up to $80 per outing, depending on how many clients go).

Career advisors are also equipped with beepers and can be paged at any time for emergencies. Although VFI provides up to three hours of compensatory time off for such after-hours work, by one career advisor's account, talking with clients on the phone can consume up to six hours of personal time a week. Although the off-hours contact is invaluable—especially for students whose personal lives may be chaotic and prone to crises—the drain on career advisors is a constant concern for VFI management. "I sometimes have to talk to them," said a supervisor, "about making sure they don't lose that line between their work and their life."

Staying in Touch After Placement

After their first day on a new job, clients get a call from their career advisor to talk over everything that happened that day. In a free-ranging conversation, the career advisor's questions are direct and designed to ferret out any signs of trouble: "What time did you arrive? When did you take lunch? What did you wear? Were you busy all the time? When things got slow, did you ask for

more work? Did you have any confrontations? Did they ask you to do things you didn't know how to do?"

The career advisor normally does not call the client's employer until two or three work days have passed, mainly so as not to raise any red flags about the client or the program. But within a few days, the career advisor makes an appointment to meet the employer and visit the workplace, and then takes the new employee to a "business lunch," courtesy of VFI. Some employers are reluctant to meet, and many will give the career advisor only a few minutes. But even so, career advisors find it useful to see the employer and the workplace firsthand, to verify what they learn from the client about the job requirements and the client's performance, and at least to leave open the possibility that the employer will let the career advisor help if problems arise.

After the introductory meeting, career advisors normally try to meet with the employer one more time and then maintain occasional telephone contact unless the employer seems to want more. The business lunches with clients continue for roughly six months, however, as part of the career advisor's regular monitoring. The relationship between client and advisor varies over time. During the first week on the job, the client speaks with the career advisor every day. For the first few months after that, once a week is usually enough, and once a month for the remaining two years. Naturally, though, if a crisis develops, the contacts become frequent again.

Dealing with Crises

When they are not about lateness or missed days, most crises are set off by behavioral problems in the workplace, typically the result of a lack of experience or maturity. In those cases, the career advisor tries to intervene as quickly as possible, often as mediator between employee and employer. Sometimes the crisis is touched off by a problem the career advisor can help solve, like finding affordable child care. If the situation does not seem salvageable, the career advisor may take the client off of the job and, if the employer agrees, offer another candidate, just to save the relationship with the employer and not unduly discourage the client. About one out of every eight placements requires some kind of intervention by the career advisor.

In VFI's management records, clients remain the responsibility of their career advisor even when they drop out of the program. Career advisors will attempt to find "inactive" clients by mail, phone and even home visits, sometimes speaking with other clients in the program who know the person to find out how to get him or her involved again. It works surprisingly often; sometimes clients return to finish the program after being out for as long as seven months.

A lasting relationship

Even after two years have passed, many Moving Up graduates have stayed in touch with VFI staff, most often with the career advisors, and some ask for help or advice long after their time in the program has ended. Although there are no records on this post-program contact, it provides at least anecdotal evidence that the mentoring relationship at the heart of VFI's strategy is working. "In my mind," said one career advisor, "No student ever leaves my caseload. If they have a problem with their grandkids someday, I think some of them may be calling me about it. And that would be fine."

PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL JOB RETENTION

Even those who survive the initial challenges of entry-level work—the disappointments and criticisms, the tedium and exhaustion, the feelings of envy toward those of higher rank—the more daunting question is: "What next?" New employees soon realize that doing well on the first job is no guarantee of advancement, and that they will need all the more confidence, skill and effort to move up the ranks. Add the responsibilities of parenthood to this mix and the hurdles simply grow higher: 28 percent of Moving Up enrollees have children at the time of enrollment, and 6 percent have children during the two and half years of the program. More than half of those who drop out do so because of child-care problems.

So for Moving Up's career advisors, a day's work can bring anything from a family or child-care crisis to a run-in with drugs to the more subtle dangers of discouragement, boredom and youthful impatience. There is no job description to capture what needs to be done in all these wildly varying situations, nor does VFI attempt to create one. Instead, it manages by outcomes, effectively telling all its professional staff—case managers and job developers as well as career advisors—that their job is to get students into jobs and then help them stay employed. For career advisors, the goals are broader still: encourage graduates to improve their education where appropriate, and advance to higher earnings and more responsibility. To accomplish these goals, the means are up to the staff and the students.

Thus the first, and in some ways the most far-reaching, principle of the Moving Up model is:

1. ***Hold staff accountable for ends, not means.***

The Moving Up program is a textbook example of performance-based management: it sets demanding but realistic targets for clients' initial and long-term employment (beginning with targets set by JTPA and other funding sources), and then lets staff suit the tools to the job, case by case. At VFI, staff find this management style both liberating and exacting. On one hand, career advisors enjoy wide latitude to decide how and where they will spend their

time. They alone decide when a phone call is sufficient follow-up to monitor a client's progress and when a surprise early morning knock on the door is required. They decide when a program dropout is effectively beyond reach or when a few more phone calls might yet get the student back on track.

On the other hand, in VFI's performance records, the success of every Moving Up participant is the responsibility of one case manager, one career advisor and one job developer. Each of these employees knows unambiguously which young people are "in my numbers," and they must submit voluminous records every week on the progress of all their clients. (VFI management estimates that this record-keeping may take 30 percent of a staff member's time over the course of a year, and some staff members put the figure even higher.)

Despite the discipline of individual accountability, the program is carefully structured and managed as a team effort, with different professionals jointly accountable for the same outcomes at various steps along the way. For example, exactly three months after a student is placed, that student shows up in the performance records of three employees—a case manager, career advisor and job developer—as either still employed or not employed. At that point, the tasks of the case manager and job developer are presumed completed, but the career advisor continues to be credited or debited, based on that client's employment, at quarterly intervals over the two-year retention period.

For the balance of the retention period, reports will show how many of the career advisor's clients are employed at the 6th, 12th, 18th and 24th months. The job developer may also be called on for further help in replacing a lost job or in helping a student advance; those assignments also become part of the job developer's performance statistics. There are no gray areas in these numbers, and they count significantly in staff's performance appraisals (although appraisals are naturally based on more than just data). Salary increases are likewise tied partly to performance measurements. With an especially high-performing staff member, for example, a pay hike may come more often than once a year.

The kind of staff who succeed in this climate tend to be enterprising and versatile people—exactly what is needed for motivating, advising and brokering the career needs of young people who have few other successful adults to rely on. Just as important, they tend to be people who pass on their ambitious, "whatever-it-takes" approach to the young people they advise.

Nonetheless, although VFI relies heavily on the ingenuity of staff and students, the organization has refined a set of practices and techniques that seem to tip the odds

for most students in favor of steady employment. The most obvious of these is an atmosphere of personal discipline and professionalism that pervades the program. It can be summed up as:

2. ***Introducing participants to a "culture of employment" beginning on Day One.***

The Moving Up regimen entails more than just the discipline of punching a clock, dressing for work, and practicing professional vocabulary and manners. It aims more broadly at helping young people to feel that they are already in the world of work, not in a "program," and that they have grown out of the youthful world of unstructured time and neighborhood activities. As one student put it, "They set us up for every situation that might come up in the workplace … They put us in a situation and then teach us how to deal with it so that we're prepared when things happen out there." Said another, "If you're absent you don't get paid for that day. It's like a paycheck. They take money out of your paycheck. They make you feel like it's a job, nine to five."

The professional atmosphere presents a stark contrast to the environment of drugs, unemployment, crime and violence from which many students come. It starts with simple location: all classes are held in VFI's Manhattan headquarters, amid the offices and shops where working people congregate.

The creation of a "virtual workplace" within Moving Up is part of a broader goal of smoothing the transitions that can be unsettling to many participants, particularly the one from program to work, from being a student to being an employee. Another distinctive feature of the program, therefore, is a principle of gradual, seamless transition:

3. ***Stress coordination and continuity from training to placement to job retention.***

At first, participants in Moving Up are under the guidance of case managers whose principal goal is to shepherd them through the regimens of job readiness, skills training and job search, all the way to employment. Later, the career advisor is responsible for helping the participant plan a work life and pursue or amend the plan as necessary. But the hand-off from the case manager to the career advisor is deliberately gradual and begins early. And the job developer's involvement overlaps both of these.

For staff, these overlapping responsibilities create an opportunity for team management with each case. Case managers and career advisors, for example, typically confer with each other on active cases several times a day. For students, it means being able to rely on different kinds of help from different staff members without suddenly breaking off a valuable relationship at a critical moment and having to replace it with another.

Nonetheless, the transition from case manager to career advisor (as the two job titles imply) entails a crucial psychological transi-

tion for the participants: little by little they cease to be "cases" that must be "managed" and instead become responsible for a career that adults can advise them on but cannot control.

In practice, this often means that case managers must be highly inspiring, even demanding, taking the initiative for establishing the tone and expectations of the program. Career advisors, by contrast, tend to be nurturers and enablers—adults with high standards, to be sure, but supportive and confident all the same. "It's nice," said one participant, "to have somebody feel proud of you. Sometimes you don't have that at home and it's nice to have it somewhere else."

Finding the right mix of these traits and generally selecting the right personalities for each role are among the most important responsibilities of VFI's management. Hence, another principle that seems to underlie the program's effectiveness is to:

4. ***Hire counseling and vocational staff at least as much for their personal skills and background as for their professional credentials.***

Hardly any employee of Moving Up has a social work degree. The organization does not deliberately avoid credentialed social workers, says Assistant Executive Director Mary Bedeau, but it does not seek them out either. Far more important, in Ms. Bedeau's words, is finding someone who "will engage the students and earn their trust, and can figure out what approach will work for that student in the circumstances he or she is in. To do that, you have to have a lot of experience with the background these students come from and the world they'll be working in."

Do case managers and career advisors have to have personal histories similar to those of the students? "No, it's not essential," says Ms. Bedeau, "but it can be a plus. Several of the people who work here do have some background in common with the students. If they have an understanding of the students' world inside their skins, so to speak, it can help them be an excellent role model."

But when recruiting case managers, career advisors, and especially job developers, VFI looks first for experience, with particular emphasis on private-sector experience. Nearly all VFI professionals came in with a record of success working with the same kinds of young people as those in Moving Up. Some, for example, had previously supervised similar entry-level workers. Others were successful counselors in youth development or employment programs or in proprietary business schools. Most, at least at some point, have held some position in a private company and experienced the demands of a business environment. The most important factor, says Ms. Bedeau, is that they "understand the needs of the students, the demands of the job market, how to motivate people, and the needs of the employers they'll be working with."

Next, and just as important, the program selects case managers and career advisors

who demonstrate a balance of "passion and compassion"—people whose energy, optimism and self-confidence are palpable and infectious. This combination not only produces effective staff but apparently contributes to stability as well. Turnover at VFI is relatively low—the newest career advisor has been on the job three years, and the most senior has been there for a decade.

Participants' needs range widely, and most VFI staff regard their responsibilities as extending to any area where their clients seem to need their help. Though broad and sometimes hard to define, this constitutes an important operating principle:

5. ***Maintain a network of services that support the whole person—emotionally, physically and intellectually, as well as vocationally.***

Besides basic education, skills training, job-placement and job-retention services—and even beyond the general mentoring and emotional support that the counseling staff provides—VFI offers medical services so broadly defined that they encompass clients' physical and emotional needs. It is important to note that VFI does not attempt to provide for all its clients' needs in-house, but maintains a network of auxiliary services—and a kind of resident, all-purpose "ombudsperson," the program's nurse. "She'll lend you a suit to go out for an interview," one student said, "or they'll help you out by giving you a white button-down if you don't have one. They'll give you a tie. Sometimes shoes if you don't have money to buy them. They'll even cut your hair."

The overlapping responsibilities and the personal qualities of the VFI staff make for an atmosphere rich in caring adults on whom students can rely for guidance, good example or simple friendship. Therefore, a corollary to the principles described thus far would be:

6. ***Give participants an opportunity to develop a close, long-term relationship with at least one successful, caring adult.***

By giving its clients the opportunity to develop relationships with a number of adults—including the case manager, career advisor, instructors, nurse and other staff—the program encourages them to observe (and emulate, where appropriate) the habits and attitudes that made staff members successful. At every turn, Moving Up encourages students to form personal connections with at least the adult most directly responsible for their success—at first, the case manager, later the career advisor. "That bonding," said one career advisor, "is my way of knowing that the student will keep telling me honestly what's going on, and stay in touch with me. That's the only way I can be sure to keep track of more than 50 students—if most of them are really motivated to stay in touch with me."

Especially for career advisors, this bonding can lead to enormous demands on both work and personal time, which staff mem-

bers struggle constantly to manage. Of the 50 to 60 clients in each career advisor's caseload, roughly one-third typically need intense personal attention, another one-third are highly motivated and can function with more routine contact, and one-third fluctuate somewhere in between, needing more attention at some times, less at others. Balancing these time demands with the job's other responsibilities and their own private time is a critical skill for a successful career advisor.

Once students are working, the crucial follow-up contact with career advisors can present a host of time problems: clearly, these contacts cannot interfere with the client's job, but they should not take up the career advisors' personal evening hours either. VFI's solution to this problem has become a cornerstone of its job-retention strategy:

7. ***Once students are employed, incorporate the program's services into the rhythm of their workday, so staff can provide effective support without disrupting the job.***

In the first six months after placement, career advisors routinely take working clients to a "business lunch" during their normal midday break. Clients appreciate the chance to compare notes with their advisors—and get a free meal in the bargain. And the advisors can hear their clients' thoughts, concerns and reactions "while the workday is still at the front of their minds," as one career advisor put it. These lunches are just one of several techniques for adapting Moving Up's post-placement services to the clients' work day and emphasizing that the demands of the job come first. VFI also conducts workshops or GED classes for working clients after business hours. And career advisors are on call, by pager, 24 hours a day.

Giving effective advice often requires career advisors to have an independent sense of the workplace, the employer and the job. Yet most employers and supervisors do not have time for "counseling sessions" with career advisors, and respecting employers' time is essential for maintaining VFI's job pipelines. Therefore, the program has evolved a balanced strategy for getting to know employers' needs while staying out of their way:

8. ***Cultivate employers whose requirements you understand, and use every opportunity, no matter how brief, to learn something more about the company and its industry.***

VFI begins by concentrating on a few industries, especially hospitality, in which it already has significant experience and can give its students a competitive, industry-driven curriculum of training. It then uses brief meetings with employers, whatever industry they are in, to gauge their needs and to learn more about the requirements of the job. As VFI cultivates more and more "repeat business" with these employers, its knowledge base grows—both for preparing new job candidates and for counseling those already placed in these jobs. As a result, career

advisors usually know, even before a student starts working, the kind of environment the student should expect or what special functions they should try to master quickly.

In one office, for example, the fax machine was notoriously balky. An alert career advisor, familiar with the company, warned her client ahead of time how to keep the machine from jamming—a skill the employer never stopped praising. In another example, the career advisor gave a client the employer's product catalog to study in advance, so he would learn his way around the warehouse more quickly. The head start contributed both to the student's job performance and to his self-esteem.

All these principles describe a program that devotes significant time, resources and adult attention to young people who otherwise would have little chance of making it on their own in the labor market. Still, Moving Up does not pretend to be for all disadvantaged youth. In particular, it does not offer a "miracle cure" to young people who are not ready to build at least enough discipline to show up regularly, listen to advice, follow some elementary rules and try to succeed.

Finding candidates who can persevere through a process of behavioral change, periodic setbacks and the demands of entry-level employment without succumbing to frustration, anger or defeatism can be as challenging as any of the program's other elements. Hence, there is one final principle, at least as important as the rest:

9. ***Retention begins at intake.***

At least in theory, employment programs can provide training, placement and even in some cases a job. But no program can "provide" job retention. Ultimately, successful retention depends as much on the participant as on the support, crisis intervention and encouragement that a good program offers. Success demands from the student at least a rudimentary determination to persevere through disappointments, tedium and adversity.

Therefore, in VFI's philosophy, job retention begins with the selection of participants who want to conquer the difficulties of the job market. From among those who are categorically hardest to place, therefore, VFI makes every effort to attract young people who, despite their disadvantages, show a will to persevere and achieve. The program's managers feel strongly that this will is indispensable for success. And students tend to agree. Said one:

> *[Moving Up] is your last chance. If you don't do good in here, where are you gonna be, on the corner selling drugs? There ain't no future there for you. You already messed up in high school. They kicked you out or you dropped out. So you're like, "Hey, this is my last chance right here, and I'm gonna take it."*

Conclusion

From its earliest recruitment efforts, through intake, training, counseling, placement and post-placement services, the Moving Up program focuses not just on employment, but on durable employment—on careers, not jobs. The "virtual workplace" in its offices and classrooms, the students' "paycheck" during training, and the general climate of high expectations and mutual responsibility prepare students to think of their lives as fundamentally changing for the long term.

One student recalled:

> *When I first came into the program, I was slacking off. But after four months, I got used to it. You feel like you're a man now, and not a little kid anymore. You start to make a difference, like "I gotta do my thing; I gotta go to work. Pretty soon I might be a man, have my own family." I want for my kids what I never had in my family. So that's how it is in this program. It makes you feel like that.*

To support that fundamental change, Moving Up provides an open-ended, long-term relationship with adult mentors. And that relationship begins not when they have a job, but while they are still in training. The job-retention effort, in other words, starts well before there is any job to retain. The training, placement and post-placement functions are tightly intertwined, not separate parts of a three-phase program. In the view of VFI management and staff, that is a central factor—maybe the central factor—in the program's success.

A student summed up the approach this way:

> *[Moving Up] set us up for every situation that might come up in the workplace, whether it be sexual harassment, racism, whatever. They put us in a situation, and then teach us how to deal with it so that we're prepared when things happen out there . . . There's times when I get stressed and I feel like quitting. But I remember at the same time: Didn't we say such-and-such? And they taught us such-and-such. And you know, it comes back to you.*

"The first thing I tell my students," said a veteran VFI career advisor, "is that I'm there to work with them for the long haul. We're in this together, and they're going to make it. And as far as I'm concerned, my job isn't finished until they do."

ENDNOTES

1. Sum, Andrew, Neeta Fogg and Neal Fogg (1997), in *A Generation of Challenge: Pathways to Success for Urban Youth*. Baltimore: Sar Levitan Center for Policy Studies.

APPENDIX

The Vocational Foundation, Inc.*

The Vocational Foundation, Inc. (VFI) was founded in 1936 with the mission of easing the poverty conditions of youth from New York City's most disadvantaged communities by helping them reach economic self-sufficiency through job training, placement and retention. The program works with over 1,000 at-risk young adults a year, and since its inception has served over 150,000 people. VFI operates on a budget of about $3 million a year, with half of its funding coming from the city and state of New York and half from foundations, corporations and individual donations.

VFI employs a staff of 48, that includes case managers, training instructors, career advisors and job developers, who work together to help clients prepare for, find and stay in jobs. The program offers its clients five months of GED preparation, employability skills, career and health counseling, and job training in either computer and office technology, hospitality or drafting and construction inspection. All participants take part in VFI's Moving Up program, which as you have read, provides 24 months of post-placement career development and job-retention services.

VFI has also developed specialized programs to serve the specific needs of its clients. In 1992, it launched the Employment and Parenting for Young Families Program, which works to assist young fathers and mothers with job training and/or job placement needs, and provides additional guidance in parenting. This program is designed to bridge the gap in communication present among so many teen and young adult parents in the hopes of reuniting fathers and children and fostering communication between parents—with a goal of improving the child's likelihood of a healthy, successful life.

VFI recently collaborated with Clearpool, a non-profit organization focusing on enhanced educational services for children, to open an employability program in the PS 43 elementary school in South East Mott Haven, a neighborhood with one of New York City's highest unemployment rates.

The program is open to parents of current and former students of PS 43 (and when space permits all community adults), and its goal is two-fold: to help poor families escape poverty by providing skills and employment to parents and to promote parents as partners in their children's education. While children attend school, VFI provides parents basic educational skills instruction, computer technology training, English as a Second Language classes and support services to help ease the transition to the world of work.

In the interest of reaching a larger number of the city's disadvantaged youth, VFI launched its first school-to-work initiative in 1995 for the students of Chelsea High School in Manhattan and Wingate High School in Brooklyn. The School to Work Transition Initiative is focused on the hospitality industry and works to help young people stay in school through graduation, and then make the shift from school life to a career in one of New York City's most important industries. The program combines school-based learning in job-related reading, writing and math skills; coordinated work experience assignments in the city's hotels; and after-school activities that include job-training workshops, career counseling and planning, and links to colleges.

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* VFI gathers and processes its own data on participant outcomes and is the source for all data related to the program in this paper.

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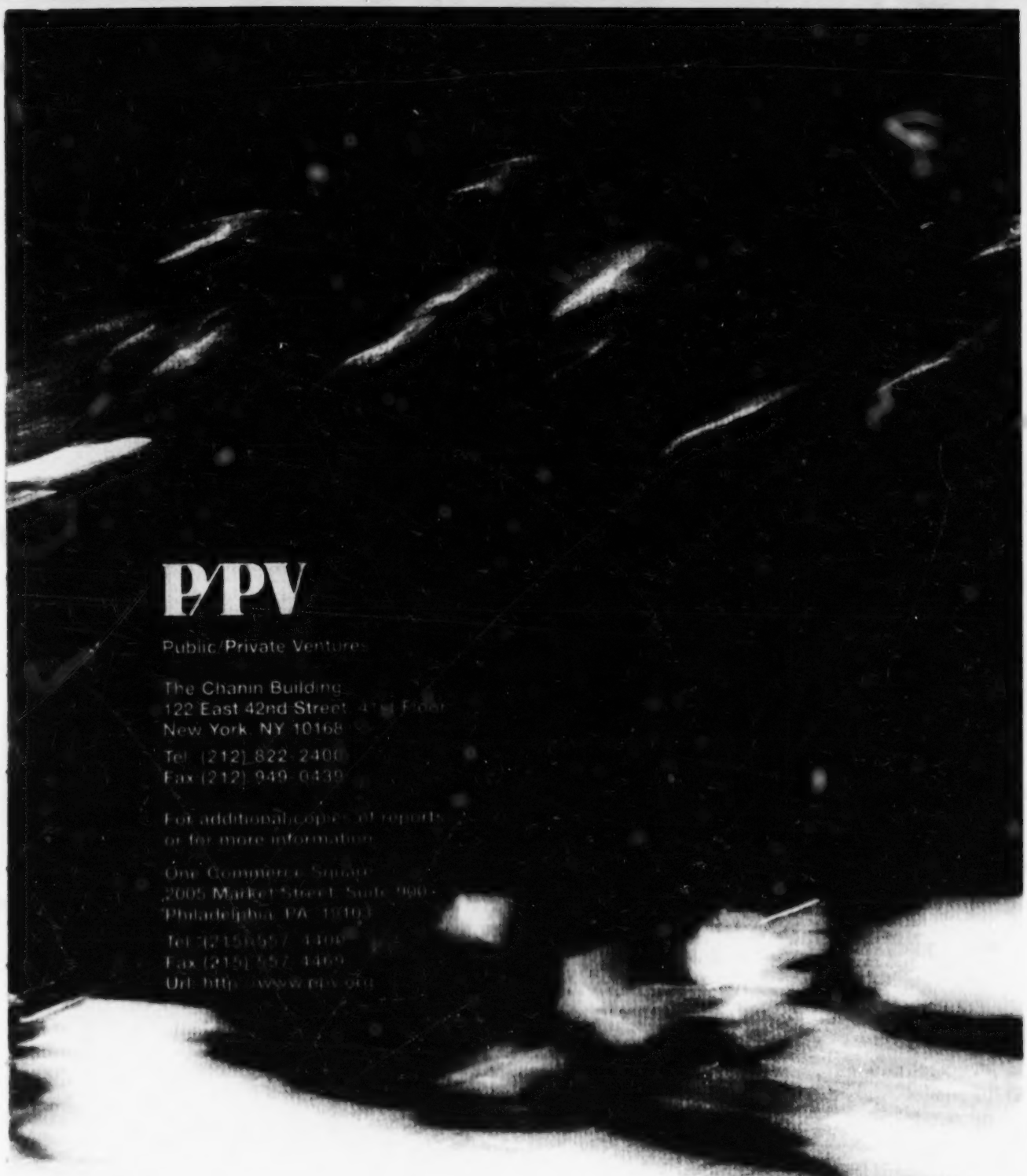
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